

The Libertine Overthrow :
Or, a *MIRROR* for
Atheists;

Wherein they may clearly see their *Prodigious Follies, Vast Extravagancies, Notorious Impieties and Absurdities* :

Containing a Compendious Account of the *Aggrieved Miserable Life, and Eminent and Sincerely Penitent Death,*

Of that Great States-Man, Eminent Poet, and Learned Scholar,

JOHN Earl of ROCHESTER,

Who departed this Life the 26th of July,
MDCLXXX.

Wherein is briefly recited not only his Disputes and Arguments against God and Religion, as the same were used in Conferences with Divines, and at several Atheistical Meetings; but also the chief of his notorious Pranks, such as his turning Mountebank, his Disgulfing himself in the Shapes of Beggars, his Amours, Revels, &c.

all which is added, The plain manner of his wonderful Conversion, which was by hearing read the 37th Chapter of *Isaiah*, his Christian deportment and Godly Expressions during his last Sickness; as also his Dying Remonstrance left in Writing, and signed and attested by Eminent Witnesses.

The whole, for the use of the meanest Capacities, abstracted from the Remarks of the Right Reverend D. Gilbert Burnet, now Bishop of Sarum, and the Reverend Mr. Parsons, Chaplain to *James* Countess of Rochester.

Licent & according to Order.

London, Printed and Sold by J. Arisford, without Bishopsgate,

A Mirror for Atheists.

THE daily growth of Impiety and Atheism amongst the meaner sort, obliges me to publishing the ensuing compendious Abstract wherein will appear the emptiness, shallowness and insignificancy of the greatest and wisest Arguments, against the Being of an Omnipotent Jehovah; in handling of which, I shall transcribe the Remarkable Passage of the Life of John Earl of Rochester, a Great Man, a greater Sinner, but at the last by divine Mercy, an Eminent and Zealous Penitent. One who had for several Years, made it his Business to argue against God and Religion, and plac'd his Bliss and Happiness, summum bonum, in carnal Pleasures and sensual Lights; but to be methodical, I shall give a short description of his Birth, Parentage and Education.

As for his Family, on both sides, from which he was descended, they were some of the most famous in their Generations. His Grandfather was that Excellent and truly great Man, Charles Lord Wilmot, Viscount Athlone in Ireland. He was his Father, who inherited the same Title, and Greatness, was by his late Majesty King Charles the I. created Baron of Adderburg in Oxfordshire and by King Charles the II. the Earl of Rochester. His Mother, of whom many worthy things may be spoken, was the Relict of Sir Francis-Henry Lee of Ditchley, in the County of Oxford, Baron

nd Daughter of that Generous and Honourable Gentleman Sir *John, St. Johns* of *Lyddiard*, in the County of *Wilts*, Baronet.

He was Born in *April 1648*. And as for his Education, it was in *Wadham-College* in *Oxford*, under the care of that Wise and Excellent Governor *Dr. Blanford*, the late Right Reverend Bishop of *Worcester*; there it was he laid a good Foundation of Learning and Study, tho he afterwards built upon that foundation Hay and Stubble: here he first suck'd from the Breasts of his Mother the University those perfections of Wit, Eloquence and Poetry, which afterwards by his own corrupt Stomach, or some ill juices after were turn'd into Poyson to himself and others.

Leaving the University, he betook himself to travel, from which he return'd in the 18th Year of his Age, and appear'd at Court with as great advantages as most ever had, greatly signaling his Valour at Sea in the Year 65. when he went with the Earl of *Sandwich*, &c. He had so entirely laid down the Intemperance that was growing on him before his Travels, that at his Return he had nothing more. But falling into Company that loved these Excesses, he was, tho not without difficulty; and by many Steps, brought back to it again. And the Natural Heat of his Fancy being inflamed by Wine, made him so extravagantly lascivious, that many, to be diverted more by that humour, studied to engage him deeper and deeper in Intemperance; which at length did so entirely subdue him, that (as he told the Reverend *Dr. Burnet*, now Bishop of *Sarum*) for five Years together he was continually Drunk; not all the

while under the visible Effects of it, but his Blood was so inflamed, that he was not in all that time cool enough to be perfect Master of himself. This led him to say and do many wild and unaccountable things. There were two Principles in his Natural temper, that being heightened by the Heat, carried him to great Excesses; a violent love of Pleasure, and a disposition to extravagant Mirth. The one involved him in great sensuality; the other led him to many odd Adventures and Frolics, in which he was oft in hazard of his Life. The one being the same Irregular Appetite in his Mind, that the other was in his Body, which made him think nothing diverting that was not extravagant. And tho' in cool Blood he was a generous and good Natured Man, yet he would go far in his Heats, after any thing that might turn to a Jest, or matter of Diversion. And so he came to bend his Wit and divert his Studies and Endeavours to support and strengthen these ill Principles both in himself and others.

An accident fell out after this, which confirm'd him more in these Courses: (I shall relate it in the very Words of the Reverend D. Burnet) 'When he went to Sea in the Year 1665. there happen'd to be in the same Ship with him Mr. Mountague, and another Gentleman of Quality: these two, the former especially seem'd perswaded that they should never return into England. Mr. Mountague said he was sure of it, the other was not so positive: The Earl of Rochester, and the last of these, entered into a formal Engagement, not without Ceremonies of Religion, that if either of them died, he should appear, and give

give the other Notice of a future state, if there was any. But Mr. *Mountague* would not enter into the Bond. When the day came that they thought to have taken the *Dutch Fleet* in the Port of *Bergen*, Mr. *Mountague*, though he had such strong Presage in his Mind of his approaching Death, yet he generously staid all while in the the greatest Danger: The other Gentleman signaliz'd his Courage in a most undaunted manner till near the end of the Action; when he fell on a sudden into such a trembling, that he could scarce stand; and Mr. *Mountague* going to him to hold him up, as they were in each others Arms, a Cannon Ball killed him ont-right, and carried away Mr. *Mountague's* Belly, so that he Died within an Hour after. The Earl of *Rochebester* (says the Doctor) told me, that these presages had in their Minds made some Impression on him, that there were seperated Beings; and that the Soul either by a Sagacity or some secret Notice communicated to it, had a sort of Divination: But that Gentleman never appearing was a great Snare to him during the rest of his Life.

As to the Supream Being, he had always some Impressions of one, and profess'd often that he never knew an entire Atheist who fully believ'd there was no God: yet when he explain'd this notion of his Being, it amounted to no more than a vast power, that had none of the Attributes of Goodness or Justice, we ascribe to the Deity: These were his Thoughts about Religion. For Morality, he freely own'd to me (saith the Reverend Dr. *Burnet*) that tho he talk'd of it, as a finething, yet

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yet this was only because he thought it a decent way of speaking, and that as they went always in cloaths, tho' in their Frolicks they would have chosen sometimes to have gone Naked, if they had not feared the people: So tho' some of them found it necessary for humane Life to talk of Morality, yet he confessed they cared not for it, further than the Reputation of it was necessary for their credit, and Affairs; of which he gave many Instances, as their professing and swearing friendship, where they hated Mortality; their Oaths and Imprecations in their Addresses to Women, which they intended never to make Good: The delight they had in making people quarrel; their unjust usage of their Creditors, and putting them off by any deceitful promise they could invent, that might deliver them from present Importunity; of all which he afterwards sincerely Repented.

He would often go into the Country, and be for some Months wholly imployed in study, or the Sallies of his Witt; which he came to direct chiefly to *Satyre*. For his other Studies they were divided between the comical and witty Writings of the Antients and Moderns, the Roman Authors, and Books of Physick, which the ill state of Health he was fall'n into, made more necessary to himself: and which qualified him for an odd Adventure which I shall but briefly mention. Being under an unlucky Accident which obliged him to keep out of the way, he disguis'd himself, so that his nearest Friends could not have known him, and set up in *Tower-street* for an *Italian Mountebank*, where he had a stage, and practis'd Physick some weeks not without success. In his latter Years, he

he read Books of History more. He took pleasure to disguise himself as a Porter, or as a Beggar, sometimes to follow some mean Amours, which for the vaniety of them, he affected. At other times meerly for Diversion, he would go about in odd shapes, in which he acted his part so naturally, that even those who were on the Secret, and saw him in these shapes, could perceive nothing by which he might be discovered.

Besides the Derision calumnies and Jeers he put upon Religion in his Lampoons Satyrs, &c. it was too frequent a Custom with him to meet with several dissolute Persons, purposely to ridicule and dispute against Religion, &c. of which I shall give one memorable Instance related by Mr. Parsons, as the Earls own Words, One day at an Atheistical Meeting, at a Person of Qualities, I undertook to manage the Cause, and was the principal Disputant against God and Piety, and for my performances received the applause of the whole company; upon which my mind was terribly struck, and I immediately reply'd thus to my self; Good God! That a man, that walks upright, that sees the wonderful works of God, and has the use of his senses and reason, should use them to the defying of his Creator! But tho' this was a good Beginning towards my Conversion, to find my Conscience touch'd for my Sins, yet it went off again; I lay all my Life long I had a secret value and reverence for an honest man, and lov'd Morality in others. But I had form'd an odd Scheme of Religion to my self, which would solve all that God or Conscience might force upon me; yet I was not ever well reconciled to the Business of Christianity, nor had that Reverence for the Gospel of Christ as I ought to have, p. 23. of E. of Rochesters Funeral Sermon.

In

In this Antheistical state of Mind, denying the Power of the Almighty: and despising his Ministers, he continued till by a most wonderful Providence, the Lord was pleased to open his Blinded Eyes: And it was thus, as he gave the account to the Reverend Dr. Burnet.

Mr. Parsons in order to his Conviction, read him the 53. Chapter of our Saviour's Passion, that he might there see a Prophecy concerning it, written many Ages before it was done; which the Jews that Blasphemed Christ, still kept in their Hands as a Book divinely Inspired: He said it to me, *Mr. Parsons, That as he heard it read, he felt an inward force upon him, which did so enlighten his Mind and convince him, that he could resist it no longer: the Words had an Authority which did shoot like Rays or Beams in his Mind; so that he was not only convinced by the Reasonings he had about it, which satisfied his understanding, but by a Power which did so effectually constrain him, that he did ever after as firmly believe in his Saviour, as if he had seen him in the Clouds.* He had (said my Author) made it be read so often to him, that he had got it by Heart: and went through a great part of it in discourse with me with a sort of Heavenly Pleasure, giving me

Reflections on it: some few I remember
 Nos. 1. *Who hath believed our Report? He* he said, *was foretold the Opposition the Gospel would meet with from such Wretches as he was.*

Nos. 2. *hath no Form nor Comeliness, when we shall see him. there is no Beauty that we should desire him.* On this he said, *the meanness of his Appearance has made vain and foolish People despise him, because he came not in such*

his Coat as they delight in, thus far his own words.

Having thus far trac'd his Life, in several considerable and valuable Passages. I shall now Compendiously insert some of his chief Atheistical Arguments, used in defence of his immoralities, and vicious Practices, as the same were urg'd to, and answer'd by the Right Reverend Dr. Burnet, as he takes it; upon their first Acquaintance.

The Three chief things they talked about were Morality, Natural Religion, and Revealed Religion, Christianity in particular: For Morality (saith my author) the Earl confessed, he saw the necessity of it, both for the Government of the World, and for the Preservation of Health, Life, and Friendship, and was much ashamed of his former practices, rather because he had made himself a pest, and had brought pain and sickness on his body, and had suffered much in his Reputation, than from any deep sense of a Supreme Being or another State: But so far this went with him, that he resolv'd firmly to change the course of his life, which he thought he should effect by the study of Philosophy, and had not a few no less solid than pleasant Notions concerning the folly and madness of Vice: but he confessed he had no remorse for his past actions, as offences against God, but only as Injuries to himself and mankind.

Upon this Subject, saith the Reverend Doctor, he shew'd him the Defects of Philosophy for reforming the World: That it was a matter of Speculation, which but few either had the leisure or capacity to enquire into. But the Principle that must

must reform mankind, must be obvious to every man's Understanding. That *Philosophy* in matters of Morality, beyond the great lines of our Duty had no very certain fixed Rule; but in the lesser Offices and Instances went much by the fancies of Men, and Customs of Nations and consequently could not have Authority enough to bear down the propensities of Nature, Appetite or Passion. For which (saith the Doctor) I instanced in two Points, The one was about that *Maxim* of *Stoick*, to extirpate all sort of Passion and contend for any thing, &c. The other was upon the restraint of pleasure how far that was to go. Upon this saith my Author, he told me the two *Maxims* of his *Morality* then were, that he should do nothing to the hurt of any other, or that might prejudice his own Health: And he thought that pleasure when it did not interfere with these was to be indulged as the Gratification of our Natural Appetites. It seemed, continued he, unreasonable to imagine these were put into man only to be strained, or Curbed to such a narrowness: That he applied to the free use of Wine and Women.

To this, saith my Author, I answered, That Appetites being natural, was an Argument for indulging them, then the Revengful might as well alledge it for Murder, and the Covetous for Stealing; whose Appetites are no less keen on those objects; and yet it is acknowledg'd that these Appetites ought to be curb'd. If the difference is only from the Injury that another Person receives the Injury is as great, if a Man's Wife is defiled or his Daughter corrupted? And it is impossible for a Man to let his Appetites loose to vagrant Lusts.

d not to transgress in these particulars. I
 either urged, saith the Doctor, that *Morality*
 could not be a strong thing, unless a Man were
 terminated by a Law within himself; for if he
 ly measured himself by decency, or the Laws of
 the Land, this would teach him only to use such
 caution in his ill practices, that they should not
 break out too visibly; but would never carry him
 to an inward and universal probity: That Virtue
 was of so complicated a Nature, that unless a
 man came intirely within its discipline, he could
 not adhere stedfastly to any one Precept; for
 they are often made necessary supports to one
 another. That this cannot be done, either steddily
 with any Satisfaction, unless the Mind does in-
 wardly comply with, and delight in the Dictates
 of Virtue. And that could not be effected, ex-
 cept a man's nature were internally regenerated and
 changed by a higher Principle: Till that came
 out, corrupt Nature would be strong, and Phi-
 losophy but feeble: especially when it struggled
 with such appetites or Passions as were much kin-
 ed, or deeply rooted in the constitution of ones
 body. This, said the Earl, sounded to him like
Enthusiasme, or *Canting*: He had no Notion of it,
 and so could not understand it.

He comprehended the Dictates of *Reason* and
Philosophy, in which as the Mind became much con-
 stant, there would soon follow, as he believed,
 greater easiness in obeying its precepts: I told
 him on the other hand, that all his Speculations
Philosophy would not serve him in any stead, to
 the reforming of his Nature and Life, till he ap-
 pealed himself to God for inward assistances. It

was certain, that the Impressions made in his Reason governed him, as they were lively presented to him: But these are so apt to slip out of our Memory, and we so apt to turn our thoughts from them, and at some times the contrary Impressions are so strong, that let a man set up a reasoning in his Mind against them, he finds that Celebrated saying of the Poet.

Video meliora proboq; deteriora sequor.

I see what is better and approve it: but follow what is worse.

to be all that *Philosophy* will amount to. Where as those who upon such Occasions apply themselves to God, by earnest Prayer, feel a disengagement from such Impressions, and themselves endued with a power to resist them. So that those bonds which formerly held them, fall off.

This he said must be the effect of a heat in Nature: it was only the strong diversion of the thoughts, that gave the seeming Victory, and he did not doubt but if one could turn to a *Problem* in *Euclid*, or to Write a Copy of Verses, it would have the same effect. To this I answer, That such Methods did only divert the thoughts, there might be some force in what he said: but if they not only drove out such Inclinations, but began Impressions contrary to them, and brought men into a new disposition and habit of mind; then he must confess there was somewhat more than diversion, in these changes, which were brought on our minds by true Devotion.

He further said sometime after that he did not understand the Business of Inspiration; he believed the pen-men of the Scriptures had heats and humors

and so writ: but could not comprehend how
 should reveal his Secrets to mankind. He could
 not apprehend how there should be any corruption
 in the nature of Man, or a lapse derived from
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 the odd transitions, the seeming contradictions,
 chiefly about the order of time, the Cruelties en-
 joined the *Israelites* in destroying the *Canaanites*, Cir-
 cumcision, and many other Rites of the Jewish
 worship seemed to him insupportable to the Divine Na-
 ture: And the first three Chapters of *Genesis*, he
 thought could not be true unless they were Parables
 of this was the substance of what he excepted to Re-
 vealed Religion in general, and to the *Old Testament*
 in particular.

But in all these things (said the Reverend B. Burnet)
 told him he was in the wrong way, where he ex-
 amined the Business of Religion, by some dark
 parts of Scripture: Therefore I desir'd him to con-
 sider the whole contexture of the *Christian Religi-*
 on, the Rules it gives, and the methods it prescribes,
 nothing can conduce more to the peace, order and
 happiness of the World than to be govern'd by
 its Rules, nothing is more for the interest of every
 Man in particular: the Rules of Sobriety, Tem-
 perance and Moderation were the best preservers of
 life, and which was perhaps more, of Health;
 the familiarity, Contempt of the vanities of the World,
 and the being well employed, rais'd a man's mind
 to a freedom from the follies and temptations that
 haunted the greatest part. Nothing was so gene-
 rous and great as to supply the necessities of the
 poor, and to forgive Injuries: nothing rais'd and
 maintained a Man's Reputation so much, as to
 be

be exactly just and merciful, Kind, Charitable and Compassionate: Nothing opened the powers of Man's Soul so much as a calm Temper, a serene Mind; free of passion and disorder: Nothing made Societies, Families, and Neighbourhoods so happy as when these Rules which the Gospel prescribes, take place, *of doing as we would have others to do to us, and loving our Neighbours as our selves.* The *Christian Worship* is also plain and simple, suitable to so pure a Doctrine; the ceremonies of few and significant.

The Issue of all this Discourse was, He told the Reverend D. Burnet, that he saw Vice and Impiety were as contrary to Humane Society, as wild Beasts let loose would be; and therefore he firmly resolved to change the whole method of his Life to become strictly just and true, to be chaste and Temperate, to forbear swearing and Irreligious Discourse, to Worship and Pray to his Maker. And that tho' he was not arrived at a full persuasion of *Christianity*, he would never employ his Wit to run it down or corrupt others; This Hopeful Bud of Grace, by the Blessing of God so fructified, that in a short time he became not an *almost*, but an *altogether* Christian. Some Instances I shall compendiously give. And

I. His hearty concern for the pious Education of his Children, wishing that his Son might never be a *Wit*, that is, (as himself explained it) one of those wretched Creatures, who pride themselves in abusing God and Religion denying his Being, or his Providence, but that he might become an Honest and a Religious Man, which could only be the support and Blessing of his Family; Complaining, *what a vicious and naughty*

naughty World they were brought into, and that no Fortunes or Honours were comparable to the Love and Favour of God to them, in whose name he Blessed them, Pray'd for 'em, and committed them to his Protection.

And here I must not pass by his pious and most passionate Exclamation to a Gentleman of some Character, who came to visit him in his last Sickness: O Remember that you contemn God no more, he is an avenging God, and will visit you for your sins; with his mercy I hope, touch your Conscience sooner or later as he has done mine; you and I have been Friends and Sinners together a great while, therefore I am the more free with you; we have been all mistaken in our conceits and Opinions; our persuasions have been false and groundless, therefore God grant you Repentance. And seeing him the next day again, he said to him, Perhaps you were disobliged by my plainness yesterday; I spake the words of Truth, and soberness to you, and (striking his hand upon his Breast) said, I hope God will touch your Heart. To this may be added, his Comfortable Persuasions of Gods accepting him to his Mercy, saying three or four days before his Death, I shall die, but oh! What unspeakable Glories do I see! What Joys beyond thought or Expression; am I sensible of! I am assured of God's Mercy to me through Jesus Christ. Oh how I long to die and to be with my Saviour.

The time of his Sickness and Repentance was just nine Weeks; in all which time, he was so much Master of his Reason, and had so clear an understanding, (saying 30. hours, about the middle of it, in which he was delirious) that he never dictated or spoke more composed in his Life: and therefore if any shall continue to say, his Piety was the effect of

of Madnes or Vapours; let me tell them it is highly disingenuous, and that the Assertion is as silly, it is wicked. nor was this thing done in a corner, numbers visited and attended him; and surely, any, the learned Physicians, that were conversant with him in the whole course of his tedious sickness, are competent Judges of a *Phrensy* or *Delirium*.

To conclude these Remarks, I shall insert his dying Remembrance, sufficiently attested and sign'd by his own Hand, as truest sence, (which I hope may be useful for that Good end design'd it,) in manner and form following

For the benefit of all those whom I may have drawn into sin by My example and encouragement, I leave to the world this my last Declaration, which I deliver in the presence of the great God, who knows the secrets of hearts, and before whom I am now appearing to be judged.

That from the bottom of my soul I detest and abhor the whole course of my former wicked life; that I think can never sufficiently admire the goodness of God, who has given me a true sense of my pernicious Opinions and vile Practices, by which I have hitherto lived without Hope, without God in the world; have been an Open Enemy to Jesus Christ, doing the utmost despite to the holy Spirit and Grace. And that the greatest testimony of my Charity is, to warn 'em in the Name of God, and as they regard the welfare of their Immortal Souls, no more to deny his Calling, or his Providence, or despise his Goodness; no more to make a mock of Sin, or condemn the pure and excellent Religion of my ever Blessed Redeemer, thro' whose Merits alone I one of the Greatest of Sinners, do yet hope for Mercy and Forgiveness. Amen.

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Declared and Sign'd in the presence of

ANNE ROCHESTER,

J. ROCHESTER

ROBERT PARSONS. Jun. 16. 1680.

F I N I S.